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The Worcester War
Memorial Murals

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THE WORCESTER
WAR MEMORIAL MURALS
By
LEON KROLL

WORCESTER WORLD WAR MEMORIAL COMMISSION

Presentation to the City of Worcester, Massachusetts, of the

WAR MEMORIAL MURALS

EXECUTED BY

LEON KROLL

FOR THE

WORCESTER WORLD WAR MEMORIAL COMMISSION

IN THE MEMORIAL CHAMBER OF THE

WORCESTER MUNICIPAL MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM

WEDNESDAY, MAY 28, 1941 AT EIGHT O'CLOCK, P. M.



*“To honor the service in war of her sons and daughters
and to nourish in peace their spirit of sacrifice a grateful
city erected this building.”* CHIEF JUSTICE ARTHUR P. RUGG

AN EXHIBITION OF MR. KROLL'S PRELIMINARY DRAWINGS AND SCALE MODEL

WITH SKETCHES IN COLOR WILL BE OPEN FROM

TEN TO FIVE O'CLOCK AT THE

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

THE EXHIBITION WILL CONTINUE THROUGH JUNE TWENTY-SECOND

The WORCESTER WORLD WAR MEMORIAL COMMISSION



GEORGE S. BARTON
Secretary



RALPH EARLE*



EDWARD S. HAYES



CHARLES L. ALLEN*



GEORGE F. BOOTH
Chairman



MICHAEL J. O'HARA



GEORGE F. FULLER



HARRISON G. TAYLOR
Treasurer



JOHN E. WHITE

*Deceased

FOREWORD

WITH the completion of the Murals, reproductions of which are herein contained, and their presentation to the City, the work of the Commission comes to a close. It was chosen by a committee of over two hundred citizens, from all walks of life, and charged with the erection of a suitable Memorial to the men and women who died in the World War, 1917-1918. The Citizens' Committee, of which John E. White was chairman, raised a fund by public subscriptions which, with interest accumulations, totaled nearly \$160,000.

After two years of studies and consultations with noted sculptors and architects, the program as now executed was decided upon. The flagstaff and sculptured exedra were erected in Lincoln Square. This memorial is in line with the center axis of the Municipal Auditorium. The flag flies constantly and is illuminated by floodlights at nighttime.

The interior decoration of the Memorial Chamber of the Municipal Memorial Auditorium was then undertaken. The ornamental lights, one symbolical of the Navy and one of the Army, the ornamental gates and the marble walls were completed. Carved in the marble and lettered in gold are the names of the men and women of Worcester who gave their lives. Above the names appears the legend: "They Ventured Far in the Cause of Liberty." This was taken from a little cemetery in France where American soldiers lie. Its author is not known but its sentiment is appropriate.

The "bank holiday" of 1933 tied up the funds of the Commission and it was necessary to suspend all work until the financial situation was cleared up.

It was not until 1937 that the Commission was able to go ahead. By that time it had a balance in the treasury which justified proceeding with a program of Murals for the wall decorations. In the end, however, the sum proved to be insufficient to complete the work and the few additional thousands necessary were privately contributed.

These Murals are the culmination of the Commission's endeavors and the outstanding feature of the completed War Memorial.

The Commission is indebted to Mr. Francis H. Taylor for his invaluable voluntary services as technical adviser in all its work. It is grateful to Mr. Harrison G. Taylor who has served as Treasurer and to Mr. Perry B. Cott, assistant technical adviser.

The Commission considers itself fortunate in that Mr. Leon Kroll was induced to accept the commission to paint the Murals. Worcester is even more fortunate in having this greatest example of creative art ever wrought in the City here as a living thing, for the benefit and enjoyment of her citizens and of posterity.

GEORGE F. BOOTH, *Chairman*
(For the Commission)

INTRODUCTION

by FRANCIS HENRY TAYLOR

Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

AFTER a long delay caused by the "bank holiday" in 1933 which tied up its fund, the Worcester War Memorial Commission authorized the decorating of the walls of the Memorial Chamber of the Municipal Auditorium. During that long interval much experience and knowledge had been gained of mural painting through the activity of the Treasury Department under Mr. Edward Bruce through whom many of the best artists of the country had been engaged to decorate the walls of Federal buildings in Washington and throughout the country.

Among the finest of these murals were those which Mr. Leon Kroll had just completed in the Department of Justice Building in which he had demonstrated not only his technical capacity for handling a physical and mechanical problem of large dimensions, but also great maturity of thought and emotional perception. Mr. Kroll had reached in the Washington paintings his full stature as an artist, after a long career which had won for him not only most of the coveted national awards but representation in the important museums and galleries of the country.

The Commission turned to the Worcester Art Museum for advice and counsel. The Director was appointed Technical Adviser and a panel of artists was presented together with careful documentation of their work. The task was no light one for the magnitude of the Worcester Commission required not merely an artist of competent experience but of sensitiveness and imagination. The very size of the central panel in itself was a challenge, for it was on the scale of the largest decorations in Europe, such as those at the

Vatican, the Doges' Palace in Venice, and the Library of the Chamber of Deputies in Paris.

Of the dozen or more artists seriously considered, Leon Kroll was the unanimous choice of the Commission. To give the people of Worcester a greater familiarity with his art, a retrospective loan exhibition of his work was held at the Museum in December, 1937. This achieved a great public response and Mr. Kroll was formally awarded the contract.

In the three and a half years which have elapsed the world has suffered much. It has been no easy time for an artist to compose and execute a great memorial theme. First Munich, then the successive outrages of the Totalitarian powers seemed to conspire against the creation of a War Memorial. The three panels were scaled up and the charcoal sketches laid in starting September 1, 1939, when Poland was invaded. Coming back to Worcester after an absence, the thing which has impressed me most is the serenity and simple truth of this composition, originally conceived when a second world war seemed scarcely a reality. Mr. Kroll had felt the solemnity and timelessness of his subject and has expressed it powerfully and directly. Whatever the terrible consequences of the years ahead of us, the Memorial Chamber will maintain its placid dignity.

Worcester may well be proud to have these paintings which are so inextricably bound up with the deepest emotions of her citizens. They are not banal wall decorations; they are something more, for they have become part of the thematic and cultural heritage of the community.



THE PAINTING OF THE MURALS

by LEON KROLL

It is rarely that an artist is given the opportunity to paint murals in large spaces so beautifully designed to receive them.

I feel deeply complimented to have been selected and when the Worcester War Memorial Commission ordered me to go ahead, I decided to neglect nothing to make the work the best I was capable of and devote myself exclusively to the murals for a period of three years.

A year was spent on the compositions and studies in a secluded studio in the country. The complete color sketches in the scale of one inch to the foot and numerous drawings were presented to a full meeting of the Com-

mission on June 2, 1939. The project was unanimously accepted. I then moved my household to Worcester so that no time would be lost and the influence of my environment might have effect on the work.

I engaged as my assistants Mr. Claude Domec and Mr. Nicholas Carone. They were not experienced mural assistants, but they are talented young painters. Both of them had studied with me and were sympathetic to my ideas, so that I felt confident I could train them to help me carry out the designs over the large areas to be covered. We all worked happily together for well over a year. The last five months of the work

were devoted to painting by myself, to co-ordinate the designs and refine details.

During the year spent working on the sketches, I contracted with the firm of Roberson and Company, of London, England, to weave a heavy linen of the best obtainable flax, 30½ feet wide and 33 yards long in a



LEON KROLL

single piece without seams or knots. A special loom was required. The material was delivered at Worcester in June 1939 and was eminently satisfactory.

Various technical details and formulas used in the making of adhesive, ground, etc., have been placed on record with the War Memorial Commission, the Worcester Art Museum and the Board of Trustees of the Auditorium. A few notes may be of interest.

Besides calling on my own experience in technique, I had conversations with Mr. Alexander Abels, an expert in matters of the permanence of materials.

The walls were tested for moisture and found negative. They were thoroughly cleansed of old paint and sized. An adhesive, the formula of which was given to me by the

late Mr. Bancel LaFarge, was used to attach the raw canvas to the walls. It required sixty-two and a half gallons of adhesive to cover the twenty-five hundred square feet. The same adhesive was used in my Justice murals at Washington, D. C. As these murals were among the first commissions awarded by Mr. Edward Bruce and his associates, the material has had a satisfactory test. The mounting of the huge canvas was done by Mr. Fred Crittenden and six assistants.

The canvas was sized with rabbit skin glue and three coats of gesso were spread just thick enough to cover the top threads, the texture being sufficiently coarse to bind the gesso both chemically and mechanically.

The walls were then squared up in one foot squares. To facilitate the placing of the compositions, slides with correspondingly scaled squares were made from enlarged photographs of the color sketches. The reflections were traced lightly in charcoal, giving a rough indication of the composition. All forms were then carefully redrawn from original drawings of the various objects. I



STUDIES OF FIGURES IN GROUP
OF FLOWER BEARERS

made about two hundred drawings and color studies. The drawings were fixed on the wall with damar varnish diluted with double rectified turpentine to the consistency of fixatif.

Painting followed with pigment of the best quality ground by hand by Bocour. A mat surface is thus obtained giving the appearance of a fresco rather than an oil painting. In my opinion this method promises to be more permanent than fresco under conditions prevalent in this climate. Further-



STUDY, LABOR

more, steel constructed buildings which house elevators and other machines are subject to vibrations which, with the added rumbling of trucks and other mechanical contrivances outside the building might result in the disintegration of a fresco through cracking and powdering of the surface. Oil on canvas is more pliable and stands a better chance of resisting such conditions.

The design idea of the murals was influenced by the size and shape of the spaces and the subject matter appropriate to the purpose of the Memorial Chamber. The spaces measure approximately 30 x 57 feet for the

central panel, 16 x 25½ feet for the two side panels, and 9½ x 25½ feet for the two spaces on either side of the central panel. The Hall itself is 40 x 120 feet. Its height is 54 feet. The great height of the central panel required a design which would spread figures interestingly over that area. As the murals start ten feet from the floor, a figure much over eight feet under such conditions might look grotesque and any less than that size would be lost in so vast an area.

The main shapes used as a basis for the design are a long rectangle which spreads across the entire width of the lower part of the central panel. This rectangle is repeated in variety across the upper part in fog-bank and cloud forms. An all-inclusive triangle reaches from the lower corners to the top of the area. Cutting through this triangle and through part of the lower rectangle is an oval shape binding the two together. The hills are so spaced as to make a rhythmic ascending pattern. The vertical trees cutting through these forms balance the tall windows of the opposite wall and also function to counterpoint other forms in the area. Figures and landscape objects are distributed in harmony with these geometrical patterns and the ascending movement of the central part of the composition is achieved by a flame-like space within which figures are composed.

The spiritual, peaceful emotion which is the object of the composition is helped by these shapes, plus the gestures and expression of the figures themselves. The main forms compose in horizontal and vertical directions.

The two side panels are architectonically designed as buttresses for the central panel. They are also intended to be more active and violent in the emotion evoked. I therefore used greater contrasts and made the diagonal the dominant movement. And as it was desirable to "close" the ends of the long hall,

I made the color simpler and closer to the color of the stone wall, whereas the central panel could be opened up into greater distances and gayer colors. This gives a feeling of greater width to the room.



STUDY FOR HEAD OF FLOWER BEARER

As to the story depicted in the large panel, the idea was to honor the memory of the soldiers who died in defense of our country. I used the theme of resurrection, which is eternal, not only from the religious angle, but also because it means re-birth and in a measure the renewal of a pledge. People of all classes and races who compose the modern American city, gather in peace and harmony under our flag and all that it implies. The gesture of the soldier seen rising from the tomb symbolizes the spirit of sacrifice in defense of our way of life. Having given his utmost he confides the flag into the keeping of the young manhood and womanhood of the country.

The side panels are symbols of defense of our country on land, at sea, and in the air.

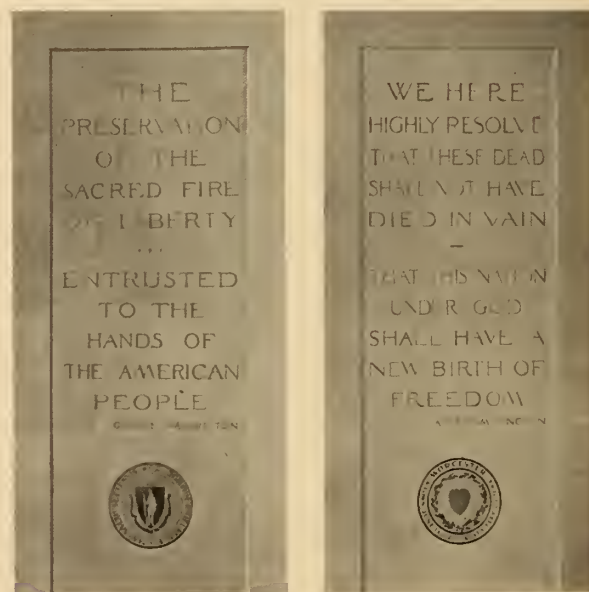
I designed and made the scale drawings of lettering and seals for the two upright panels

after the murals were completed. The quotations selected were approved by the Commission before they were carved on the wall. The carving and modeling were done by two excellent craftsmen of Worcester, the Hamill brothers, under my supervision. I did only the coloring of the seals on the wall.

Practically all of the figures were painted from studies made of men and women living in Worcester. No definite portraits were intended and while a number of the heads may be recognizable, they were done only with the idea of giving some of the character of the City to the figures. The landscape was also influenced by Worcester and its environs.

Mr. Booth, Mr. Francis Taylor, the technical adviser, and their associates on the War Memorial Commission gave me constant and sympathetic encouragement. I am also indebted to the Trustees and staff of the Worcester Art Museum for their interest and always willing assistance.

Daily contact with Mr. Cahill and the personnel at the Auditorium was helpful and agreeable. I am deeply grateful to those who in the exercise of their good will, contributed to the creation of this work.



TWO PANELS OF QUOTATIONS

Each $9\frac{1}{2} \times 25\frac{1}{2}$ Feet in Size



DEFENSE ON LAND AND IN THE AIR

Left Mural 16 x 25½ Feet





57 x 30 Feet



DEFENSE ON THE SEA
Right Mural 16 x 25½ Feet



Detail: SYMBOL OF THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE



Detail: MUSIC



Detail: MOTHER AND CHILD



Detail: EDUCATION



Detail: REVERENCE



Detail: MUSIC



Detail: HEAD OF GIRL LAYING WREATH ON TOMB



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